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THE BELIEVER ASLEEP IN JESUS.

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## A SERMON

PREACHED IN

ST. JAMES' CHURCH, POINTE À CAVAGNOL,

ON OCCASION OF THE

*Death of Mrs. Francis De Lesderniers,*

*On Sunday, 29th July, 1860,*

BY THE

REV. J. W. PYKE,

INCUMBENT.

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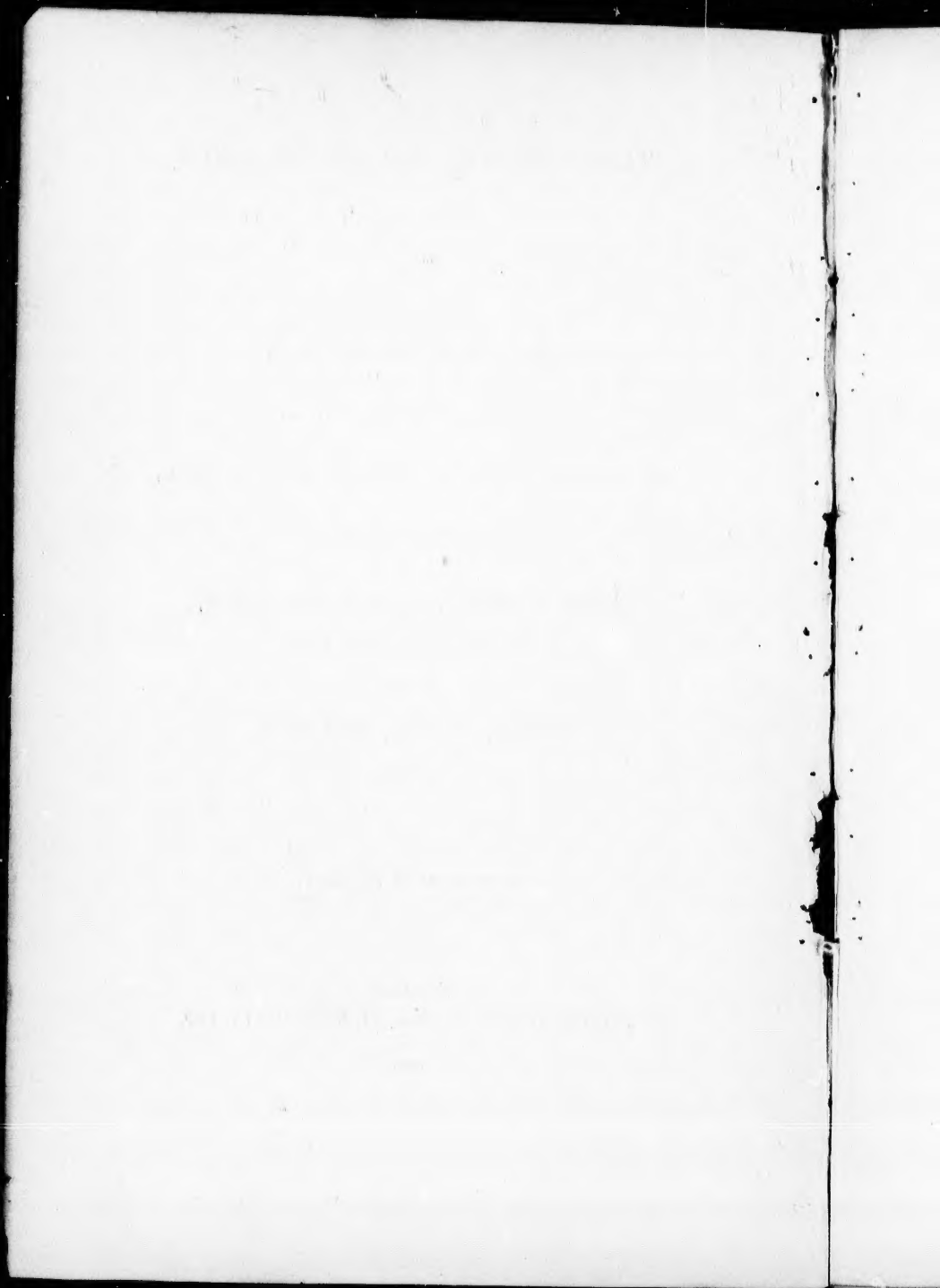
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Montreal:

PRINTED BY JOHN LOVELL, ST. NICHOLAS STREET.

1860.



## NOT DEAD BUT SLEEPING.

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"And all wept and bewailed her: but He said, weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth."—*St. Luke*, 8th chapter, 52nd verse.

"*In the midst of life we are in death*;" thus the sacred voice of our holy church most appropriately admonishes us, in that most solemn moment when she stands with us beside the grave of some departed member of her communion, engaged in the last sad ceremonial of love and duty: committing the body to the ground, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust." Yes, beloved brethren, **IN THE MIDST OF LIFE WE ARE IN DEATH.** How familiar are the words, how often have we heard them read in our sublime burial service, when present on the occasion of some funeral; but it is then most truly we realise the truth and feel the full force of this most awakening declaration, when some near and dear relative or friend is suddenly removed from us by death. Such has been the case among ourselves within the last few days. A dear relative, a beloved friend, a faithful, important and highly esteemed member of this church and community has, in the dark inscrutable providence of the all-wise God, been suddenly taken away from us. It is, my brethren, as you may all possibly remember, but a very short time since she appeared here among us, —then "*in the midst of life*,"—joining us in holy worship of our common Father and God, and in the more deeply solemn and sacred duty of sacramental communion. But a few short days have passed, and *now* she is no more on earth, no longer among us; the will of an all-wise God hath suddenly arrested her earthly race, called her body to the dust, and her spirit, as we trust, to his blessed presence and his heavenly rest. Such was His will, the will of our heavenly Father, *who dealeth with us as with sons, correcting us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.* "Clouds and darkness are round about him," the workings

of his providence are dark and mysterious, but could we penetrate the veil which hides the Almighty from our view, could we perceive and understand his secret counsel and will concerning us, doubtless brethren, we should see the wisdom and goodness of God manifested even in the darkest dispensations of his providence, and would feel constrained to join the heavenly anthem raised by the victorious saints in heaven, "Singing the song of the Lamb, and saying, great and marvellous are thy works Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways thou king of saints."

But turning our thoughts from her whose happy spirit has fled from this world of sin and sorrow, and entered the blissful regions of eternal blessedness and peace, to ourselves here below, mourners and sojourners in this vale of tears: how shall we comfort one another? how shall we improve the sad occasion to our own souls' benefit? It is, dear brethren, from that blessed gospel alone, through which "life and immortality have been brought to light;" it is from that holy, that blessed One who has mercifully revealed Himself to us in his holy word, to our lasting peace and joy and comfort, as "The resurrection and the life, in whom whosoever believeth shall live though he die, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Him shall not die eternally;" it is from Jesus and His holy word that we may, and must only, seek and find comfort under all the sorrows and trials of this painful life. And in respect to the especial sorrow which now oppresses us, and overwhelms the soul with the terrible nature of the affliction and the awful suddenness of the call, no words could be more appropriate, more soothing, and full of blessed comfort than the declaration of our divine Saviour in the text, "Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth;" "*Not dead but sleeping.*" How strange a word to the unsanctified, unbelieving ear; how strange, how difficult even for poor weak sinful minds to realise! Not dead, but sleeping—and yet we have laid the body in the cold dark chamber of the grave. True, still the spirit lives; the earthly house is dissolved, is dead, but the soul that animated it, gave all its value, its preciousness to it, now "*sleeps,*" "*sleeps in Jesus,*" as we hope and believe, that is, rests "*in joy and felicity*" until the morning of the resurrection, till "the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice

of the archangel and with the trump of God," and then "them which *sleep in Jesus* will God bring with him." . . . . "Wherefore," adds the apostle, "*comfort one another* with these words,"—thus teaching us that the true and only real comfort for all the afflicted children of earth, and especially for those who mourn for their dead, is to be drawn from the consoling truth that now they "*sleep in Jesus*," now enjoy that blessed joyful rest, that calm unruffled heavenly repose of the soul in the paradise of God, the awakening from which will only be on the glorious resurrection morn unto the blessed life eternal, but which must continue till the time appointed for the consummation of all things "when Christ who is our life shall appear, and then shall they also appear with Him in glory."

But let us enquire, how are we to understand the expression sleeping as applicable to death? Jesus was called to raise from a dying bed the only daughter of Jairus. But before he reached the ruler's house, a messenger came to the father, saying, "Thy daughter is dead, trouble not the Master." Jesus, however, bid the ruler "*fear not, only believe*," and coming to the house and entering the chamber of death, in company with the father and the mother of the maiden, while they "all wept and bewailed her," the Saviour's soothing, comforting voice bid them in the most affectionate manner "*weep not*," for said He, "she is not dead, but *sleepeth*." What then was the meaning of our blessed Saviour's words, "*she is not dead*?" Did the Lord Jesus mean to convey to the minds of his hearers the idea that the maid was not really and literally dead, in the common acceptation of the word? Certainly not, for then His calling the spirit back again would not have been a miracle in the true sense. Jesus, brethren, spake of the soul of the dead maiden, that it was not dead, was not annihilated by death, but still in existence though separated from the earthly tenement, and ready to obey the will and summons of its Creator, whenever He should call it back to the body. This great, this blessed truth, "*life and immortality*," was what He came to this world specially to reveal, this the glorious truth which for man's peace and comfort it was, and is, the great object of His holy gospel to inculcate. The sect of the Sadducees in the time of our

Lord, like the sceptics of more modern days, denied this great truth: both the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body. And it was, perhaps, with the view of confuting this vain cheerless notion of death, that our blessed Lord used the expression in the text. Still, beloved brethren, though the divine word, as well as our own daily experience, assures us of the solemn fact that these bodies are mortal and must die, must return to the ground out of which they were taken, yet is it not a most blessed hope, a most consoling truth, which we have in Christ who is our life, that the spirit which once gave life and animation to the now senseless body, still lives, its "*life is hid with Christ in God.*" Jesus our heavenly Teacher tells us it is "asleep." The metaphor is a very beautiful one, and full of comfort to all who mourn the present absence through death of any dear to them. They are asleep: does this mean then that they are insensible, in a state of unconsciousness? As regards the mortal part, the body, this is true. The cold lifeless inanimate form of the outward tabernacle is borne to the grave and laid in dust, yet is the body not so dead, so fallen into decay, so entirely destroyed, as to be beyond the power of God to restore, reform, and raise it again in all its completeness. For death and hell have been destroyed themselves by the conqueror of sin, the great captain of our salvation, and therefore death shall no more have dominion, that is a lasting dominion, over the body. The grave is only its present prison, the bed where it lays asleep, till the trump of God shall announce the resurrection morn, and then "all that are in their graves shall come forth." Then these mortal bodies "*sown in corruption, shall be raised in incorruption; sown in dishonor, shall be raised in glory; sown in weakness, shall be raised in power; sown a natural body, shall be raised a spiritual body.*" Then will the blessed Saviour fulfil towards His people His own blessed promise to come again and receive them to Himself, and "shall change these vile bodies that they may be like unto His own glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself." While the body thus rests in the dark silent chamber of the grave, awaiting this great, this glorious change, "*when the corruptible shall put on incorruption, and the mortal put on im-*

*mortality,*" say, brethren, is not its present state well described as one of sleep? Thus indeed thought the great Apostle of Jesus Christ, St. Paul, when he penned that most noble and comforting argument for the doctrine of the resurrection which forms the Lesson in our most consoling service for the Burial of the Dead; where, speaking of the state of the body in the grave under the same metaphor of sleep, the apostle says, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

But how are we to interpret the words of the Saviour as regards the soul? In what sense are we to understand the expression, "*fallen asleep in Jesus?*" Certainly not of a state of insensibility and of unconsciousness, for such an idea is utterly inconsistent with various passages of scripture, which plainly suppose the contrary. Thus in the case of Lazarus, we are told that his soul "*was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom and that there he was comforted.*" Now this is plainly inconsistent with the notion that the soul of Lazarus, when separated from the body, remained in a state of insensibility, for how then could he have been "*comforted?*" Surely that holy comfort must have consisted in a full and perfect consciousness of the blessedness of the exchange his spirit had undergone, in being carried from a condition of misery and suffering here on earth to the holy company of angels, "the spirits of the just," to the blissful joys and blessedness of the paradise of God. Again, in the case of the penitent thief upon the cross, did not the Saviour positively assure him, "*This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*" Not, surely, to sleep there unconsciously amid its blessed company, its heavenly joys, and glorious anticipations till the resurrection. No, but to retain its life, its activity, its consciousness; there to see and know its Redeemer, even as it is seen and known of him. "I am in a strait," says the apostle St. Paul, "between two opinions, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better;" but how could the apostle esteem death to be a better and more desirable thing, unless he was convinced that he would thereby be called from the service of the God and Saviour he loved in His church here below, to the higher,

more blessed, and glorious service of Him in the temple and sanctuary above? He shows, however, his true meaning in another passage, where, alluding to the trials and sufferings to which he and his faithful fellow-laborers in the Gospel were exposed, he says, "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at *home in the body, we are absent from the Lord*; we are confident . . . and willing rather to be *absent from the body, and present with the Lord*." The plain meaning of the apostle is, that when death calls away the soul from its present home or earthly house, in the body, it brings it forthwith into the presence of the Lord, into that blessed paradise where the saints of Jesus rest from the toils and sorrows and sufferings of their earthly lot; where the voice of the Lord God is heard among them to their great joy and comfort, and where they await, in joyful anticipation, the blessed hour of their "perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in eternal and everlasting glory through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Thus, then, understand what the Lord Jesus meant when He said concerning the daughter of Jairus, "*She is not dead, but sleepeth*."

The body, though now subject to the present dominion of death, shall yet at the word, and by the power of the Lord of life and death, be set free; and the spirit, which has entered the future world and there still exists, shall at the command of its Creator, return to dwell in its earthly tabernacle again, no longer a natural body, but raised a spiritual body "clothed with glory, honour, and immortality."

Then, brethren, those who have "fallen asleep in Jesus," who have "died in the Lord," that is, in a full and firm and sincere trust in the all-sufficient merits and mediation of Jesus as a Saviour and an all-prevailing intercessor, these are "*not dead, but sleeping*," "*absent indeed from the body, but present with the Lord*." Most consoling truth for all who mourn the departure from this earthly scene of beloved friends; they have laid aside the vile garments of corruption for the pure bright robes of heaven; they have ceased from toil and sorrow and pain, and passed to their peaceful rest in heaven; they have finished their course of service here in the church below, performed amid much trial and sore conflict with



the powers of darkness, and have gone to serve God in His temple, and to join in the glorious services of "the church triumphant and glorified."

Thus, then, we hope our dear departed sister has fled from the pollutions of the world, and the sorrows of this life, to rest and blessedness in heaven. How comforting for those most near and dear to her, who now in sadness feel and mourn her absence from them, to know and believe that "*she is not dead, but sleepeth.*" She hath entered into that holy peaceful beatific "rest which remaineth for the people of God." No comfort could be better or more soothing than this sweet reflection, no consolation stronger than that which so blessed a thought is designed to impart. Therefore, beloved brethren, let me say to you who mourn her departure from among you, "Sorrow not as men without hope" for her "who sleeps in Jesus, but comfort one another with these words."

In her removal the church has lost a valuable and consistent member. From the earliest establishment of this church and mission, her heart was with us. She was ever anxious and willing, according to her opportunity and ability, to further the great work of the Church, and the spiritual benefits and wants of the neighbourhood. You have had her example before you, I need not speak further of that. True piety and devotion to God need no trumpet praise of man; its record is on high, and "he who seeth in secret will reward openly;" "by their fruits" saith the Saviour, ye shall know them". And when we see professing members of the church, regular and diligent in their attendance upon her sacred ordinances and worship, we are justified in believing that we see in them that blessed fruit of the sanctifying spirit, which marks them as the true children of God.

In her the poor and distressed have lost a kind, sympathising friend. One ever "ready to do good and to distribute" to all in need and necessity. God blessed her with the means of doing good, and with her earthly treasures sanctified by deeds of love and charity, given for Christ's sake" hath she "laid up treasures in heaven" enduring treasures, which "the moth and rust cannot corrupt" nor destroy. Memorials these, of her faith and love, laid up at God's right hand, which shall meet her at the heavenly portals, and prove

her welcome, through a Saviour's approbation and merits, to the everlasting habitations of the just. Truly might it be said of her in death, that the poor "*all wept and bewailed her.*" Oh, brethren, how much better, how much more honorable, and just, thus to employ the wealth of this world in deeds of love and charity to God and man, than to squander our means upon the unsatisfying and destructive passions and desires of the fleshly mind. The one will be sure to meet the approbation and reward of our judge, the other as sure to bring upon the soul his vengeance.

But brethren let me ask you for a moment to consider, how awfully sudden this removal of our late friend and companion has been. She left the bosom of her family, as to all outward appearance in her usual health and strength, she went on an errand of mercy to fulfil that most sacred duty of love, visiting the sick, and thus while ministering with a mother's tender care to the wants of others, the summons came which called her spirit to the heavenly home. Truly then "*in the midst of life we are in death;*" how little may we frail creatures of earth, count upon a day or an hour, our time assuredly is in God's hand, and though a sudden disease, an accident, or some other cause may seem to hurry on the hour of death, yet beloved, under all these circumstances, we must acknowledge the over-ruling providence of God, and bow in humble resignation to his holy will. This uncertainty of life however should indeed teach us who survive to remember "*how short our time is.*" And since death may come upon as in an *hour when we are not aware*, oh let us so live, let us strive so to live by the power of the grace of Jesus, and the guiding of his good spirit, that death may not find us unprepared. Our departed sister has left behind her, as I have already said, the good example of a regular attendance on the sacred services and ordinances of the church. Let it then brethren be your wisdom to follow that example, to make a faithful, diligent use of the blessed sanctifying means of grace while you are permitted to enjoy them. Thus though you know not what a day may bring forth, yet if you are careful to live as Christians ought to live, in the constant fear to offend in any wise your heavenly father, and in the sincere desire to please him in all things, though your summons to his awful presence should come to your

soul in an unexpected hour, yet that summons will be welcome, it will find you ready. You will fall asleep in Jesus to wake up in the morning of the resurrection in his glorious likeness; to be called from the pit of corruption and transformed into the divine similitude when we shall see God "face to face": "see him as He is," and by seeing him shall be "changed into the same image" and then shall every desire be satisfied with the fulness of joy, with the exceeding abundance of unutterable glory,